

Dichotomy of Leadership

By Jocko Willink & Leif Babin (2018)



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- The ultimate dichotomy: to train, work with, and develop a team of friends and brothers, *to care* about these men more than anything in the world and then lead those men on missions that could *get them killed*.
 - That is the burden. That is the challenge. That is the dichotomy. That is leadership. (p.29)
- **Dichotomy 1:** (Chapter 1 - Ultimate Dichotomy)
 - Close enough the care, detached enough to make the tough decision. (p.30)
 - If leaders develop overly close relationships with their people, they may not be willing to make those people do what is necessary to complete a mission or task. (p.30)
 - They may not have the wherewithal to lay off individuals with whom they have relationships, even if it is the right move for the good of the company... they don't want to have the hard conversations with them - they don't want to tell them that they need to improve. (p.30)
 - If a leader is too detached from the team, he or she may overwork, overexpose, or otherwise harm its members while achieving no significant value from that sacrifice. (p.30)
 - Too quick to fire people to save a buck, thereby developing the reputation for not caring about the team beyond its ability to support the strategic goals. (p.30)
 - Leaders must find the balance. (p.30)
 - They must push hard without pushing too hard. (p.30)
 - They must drive their team to accomplish the mission without driving them off the cliff. (p.30)
 - Extreme ownership means that all responsibility rests with the leader, but that does not mean that the leader does everything. (p.44)
- **Dichotomy 2:** (Chapter 2 - Own it all, but empower others)
 - Balance taking too much ownership (micromanagement) with not taking enough (too hands-off) (p.49)
 - Maintaining an equilibrium where troops have the guidance to execute but at the same time the freedom to make decisions and lead. (p.53)
- **Dichotomy 3:** (Chapter 3 - Resolute, but not overbearing)
 - There is a time to stand firm and enforce rules and there is a time to give ground and allow the rules to bend. (p.75)
 - Leaders, on the one hand, cannot be too lenient. (p.75)
 - But on the other hand, they cannot become overbearing. (p.75)
 - They must set high standards and drive the team to achieve those standards, but they cannot be domineering or inflexible on matters of little strategic importance. (p.75)
 - Leaders must carefully evaluate when and where to hold the line and when to allow some slack. (p.75)
 - Be resolute where it matters but never overbearing; never inflexible and uncompromising on matters of little importance to the overall good of the team and the strategic mission. (p.76)
- **Dichotomy 4:** (Chapter 4 - When to mentor, when to fire)
 - When the leader has done everything possible to get an individual up to speed without seeing results, the time has come to let that individual go. (p.98)
 - Don't be too quick to fire - but don't wait too long. (p.98)
 - Find the balance and hold the line. (p.98)

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- **Dichotomy 5:** (Chapter 5 - Train hard, but train smart)
 - Find the balance between training that is too easy, where trainees aren't truly challenged, and training so hard that the trainees are crushed. (p.117)
 - Often it isn't recognized that the dichotomy has become unbalanced until straying too far in one direction. (p.117)
 - Some leaders strive to make sure their teams are happy, which might include overlooking performance deficiencies, allowing the teams to cut corners and not holding the line to train hard, maintain discipline, follow standard operating procedures and overcome obstacles. (p.122)
 - False cheering, telling their people they're doing better than they truly were. (p.122)
 - Leaders who never pushed the team outside its comfort zone in training, who didn't push the standards and drive their team toward exceptional performance, and who didn't provide a direct and honest critique ended up with less productive, less effective teams that failed when truly tested under the rigors of real-world challenges. (p.122)
 - As in everything, leaders must find the balance in training and focus on three critical aspects: realism, fundamentals and repetition.
- **Dichotomy 6:** (Chapter 6 - Aggressive, not reckless)
 - Default: Aggressive. (p.149)
 - Means that the best leaders, the best teams, don't wait to act. (p.149)
 - Aggressive means proactive, it doesn't mean that leaders can be aggressive toward their people. A leader must always deal professionally with subordinates on the team, peers, leaders up the chain of command, customers or clients, and personnel in supporting roles. (p.149)
 - Speaking angrily to others is ineffective. (p.149)
 - To be overly aggressive, without critical thinking, is to be reckless. (p.150)
 - To disregard prudent counsel when someone with experience urges caution, to dismiss significant threats, or to fail to plan for contingencies is foolhardy. (p.150)
 - It is bad leadership. (p.150)
- **Dichotomy 7:** (Chapter 7 - Disciplined, not rigid)
 - Disciplined procedures must be balanced with the ability to apply common sense to an issue, with the power to break with SOPs when necessary, with the freedom to think about alternative solutions, apply new ideas, and make adjustments to processes based on the reality of what is actually happening. (p.172)
 - As a leader it is critical to balance the strict discipline of standard procedures with the freedom to adapt, adjust and maneuver to do what is best to achieve victory. (p.173)
- **Dichotomy 8:** (Chapter 8 - Hold people accountable, but don't hold their hands)
 - While a leader wants team members to police themselves because they understand *why*, the leader still has to hold people accountable through some level of inspection to ensure that the *why* is not only understood but being acted upon. (p.190)
 - Accountability is an important tool that leaders must utilize. However, it should not be the primary tool. It must be balanced with other leadership tools, such as making sure people understand the *why*, empowering subordinates, and trusting they will do the right thing *without* direct oversight because they fully understand the importance of doing so. (p.191)
- **Dichotomy 9:** (Chapter 9 - A leader and a follower)
 - Every leader must be ready and willing to take charge, to make hard, crucial calls for the good of the team and the mission. But leaders must also have the ability to follow. In order to be a good leader, you must also be a good follower. (p.214)

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- If someone else has a great idea or specific knowledge that puts them in the best position to lead a particular project, the leader should become a follower. (p.214)
- A good leader recognizes that it doesn't matter who gets the credit, only that the mission is accomplished. (p.214)
- The relationship to seek with any boss incorporates three things: (p.221)
 - They trust you
 - They value and seek your opinion and guidance
 - They give you what you need to accomplish your mission and then let you go execute
- **Dichotomy 10:** (Chapter 10 - Plan, but don't over plan)
 - Never take anything for granted, preparing for likely contingencies, and maximize the chance of mission success while minimizing risk... however you cannot plan for every contingency. (p.235)
 - If you try to create a solution for every single potential problem that might arise, you overwhelm your team and overcomplicate decisions for leaders. (p.235)
 - Therefore focus only on the most likely contingencies that might arise (three or four along with the worst-case scenario). (p.235)
- **Dichotomy 11:** (Chapter 11 - Humble, not passive)
 - Humility has to be balanced by knowing when to make a stand. (p.250)
 - A leader must be humble, must listen to others, must not act arrogant or cocky. (p.259)
 - But a leader must balance that and know there are times to question superiors, to push back, to stand up and make sure the right things are being done for the right reasons. (p.259)
- **Dichotomy 12:** (Chapter 12 - Focused, but detached)
 - To become engrossed in and overwhelmed by the details risks mission failure, but to be so far detached from the details that the leader loses control is to fail the team and fail the mission. (p.285)
 - When the team is on the verge of disaster, it's time for the senior leader to put detachment aside and step into the fray, to solve problems and help the team. (p.285)
 - It is time to lead. (p.285)
 - Once those problems are getting solved, the leader can then step back to a position of detachment. (p.285)